

Shenandoah

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The Nineteen Twenties in Retrospect

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Painting—A Symposium JAMES I. GREENE

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STUART DAVIS

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Gerald W. Johnson*

THE RESURGENT TWENTIES

The Roaring Twenties, according to the conventionally accepted report, were drunken and bawdy beyond all precedent.

I do not quarrel with this representation of the period provided its representational character is clearly understood. The Twenties stood for intoxication and fornication to a conspicuous extent; but the amount of alcohol consumed was actually low and the percentage of bastardy cases in the courts did not show any startling rise. The decade achieved its reputation because it was the first period within living memory that was highly articulate on such subjects.

"The American young girl," said an agitated foreign observer, "will talk about anything, absolutely *anything*. In fact," he added, morosely, "she will hardly talk about anything else."

The absolute consumption of alcohol was not great because alcoholic beverages, while always available, were extremely expensive, of poor quality, and difficult to procure. The memorable thing was the reversal in the general estimation of their use. In times past it was agreed, in principle at least, that the proper use of a drink was a tranquilizer, an aid to digestion, and a blandly ameliorative influence in social intercourse. But when a drink became expensive and hard to come by, then its possession became proof of ingenuity and relative affluence; and to get drunk showed, not that one was witless and ill-bred, but that one could get it and therefore was a relatively bold and resourceful fellow. Naturally, public drunkenness tended to become more of a social cachet than a stigma; and that characterized the period as drunken.

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It is even easier to demonstrate that the picture of the decade as the Great Bawd is not so much falsified as highly stylized. A few centuries ago there was a design representing the Pillars of Hercules entwined with a scroll proclaiming the glories of His Most Catholic Majesty of Spain which, by steadily increasing stylization has become this: \$. The image of the Great Bawd portrays the decade of the Twenties just about as realistically as the dollar sign portrays the Pillars of Hercules.

If you doubt it, pick up one of its characteristic literary productions, say, *The Sun Also Rises*, and compare it page by page with some characteristic production of the Fifties, say Mr. John O'Hara's latest opus. You will find the early Hemingway so much further removed from the Restoration style of the Earl of Rochester that he seems almost mealy-mouthed by comparison with his present-day colleagues.

To be sure, frankness is not bawdiness; but the decade of the Twenties got its reputation in that regard precisely because a large proportion of the American people thought it was. They had been trained to think so by the dominance for nearly a hundred years of the euphuistic tradition established by the New England school. In the hands of the great New Englanders this was not an effort to avoid the truth—who looked at adultery more squarely than Hawthorne?—but an effort to avoid the crudities inevitably introduced into the language by a couple of centuries of intense preoccupation with the conquest of the physical environment.

But when the Heroes fell and the Epigoni took over American letters, this concern with verbal grace and precision began to acquire a moralistic tincture which by the year 1920 had become so strong as almost to inhibit any honest effort to deal with life as it was lived. The treatment accorded Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* in 1900 was fairly representative of the spirit of the times in those quarters influential enough to make or break a literary reputation.

The shock of the first World War was what really broke the spell of the *précieuses*. Between 1917 and 1919 four million young American men learned what sergeants are, and the half of them who went to France learned why sergeants are. It was idle thereafter to tell these four million that "life is real, life is earnest," for they had seen for themselves that life can be hell on blue

wheels, and the lily-fingered literary gentlemen who apparently had no knowledge of that fact no longer commanded their respect. Their response to literature of niceness-all-compact was the rude noise known generically as "the raspberry" and specifically as H. L. Mencken.

This first American writer of literary criticism that was read by college boys for pleasure, and not as an assignment in English II., was at first dismissed by the pundits as a mere barbarian beneath consideration. It was not until an article in the *Mercur de France* hailed him as the only important American critic that the Olympian wrath fell upon him, and then it was too late. He already had his audience and could afford to thumb his nose at the academicians; for when he bestowed the accolade upon Dreiser, upon Sinclair Lewis, upon Fitzgerald and Cabell and Hergeheimer and many others, the young men swarmed to the bookstores and bought their books.

They discovered that books were not only entertaining reading, but were plainly related to life as the readers knew it; which revealed the startling truth that literature, at least some literature, is worth the respectful attention even of a man who has no ambition to edit a magazine or become a professor of English. The least intellectual of us has to live with his fellow-men; and the least intellectual, contemplating that variety of the genus *Homo* known as the American has felt stirring within him the curiosity neatly expressed by the colored philosopher in the query, "Whut make him do like he do do?" A literature that even suggests an answer is obviously not for pedagogues alone.

The revolt of the Twenties was, in this respect, an escape from intellectual bondage, and if it was marked by some excess, that has been true of every great revolt and has never been held to invalidate the results.

But men of letters in America do not inhabit the Ivory Tower and when they stage anything resembling a mass revolt it may safely be accepted as evidence of a disturbance in the intellectual climate affecting much more than letters. Lewis' *Main Street* was no more of a break with traditional novel-writing than Beard's *Rise of American Civilization* was with traditional historiog-

raphy, or than Bowers' *Jefferson and Hamilton* was with traditional biography; and Mencken once advanced the theory that it was Gamaliel Bradford who taught the Englishman, Lytton Strachey, how to write *Queen Victoria*. That remains to be proved, but it is certain that Bradford was a bold innovator.

Whatever may be said of fiction and its melodious presentation, poetry, the permanent values of history and biography are not purely esthetic; so when they are disturbed the agitation is clearly more than a battle among artistic schools. It involves the political school, and economic realms, as well.

This was true of the Twenties. The shock of the first World War was far indeed from being confined to the soldiers who participated in its military activity. The American civilian also was jolted out of his former ways of thinking about himself and the rest of the world, and the jolt was so rough that he resented it violently. Characteristically, he looked about for a personal devil on whom to lay the blame for his malaise and characteristically, he picked on Socrates rather than the universal folly that had plunged the world into ruinous war. He administered to Woodrow Wilson a draught more bitter than hemlock and, like the Athenian dicastery, for nearly ten years congratulated himself on his virtue and sturdy common sense.

These years covered the Twenties up to October 24, 1929, a period in which the United States was drunken, indeed, but not on alcohol. It had imbibed the far more potent intoxicant of stubborn self-deception and refusal to face unpalatable truth. In participating in the first World War this country had incurred a heavy responsibility for establishing a world order that would minimize the damage and speed up the process of recovery as far as was humanly possible. But false prophets sprang up contending that because participation was forced upon us, therefore we had incurred no responsibility, or none of any great weight. The people chose to believe this lie and for nearly ten years lived in a drunkard's dream-world refusing to sober up until they were doused with bucket after bucket of ice-water in the great panic of 1929. Then, indeed, the roseate glow of the long drunk vanished and we awoke to a world of rags and hunger in the cold, gray dawn of the morning after.

Unless one clearly understands that it was a period of wild intoxication the intellectual climate of the Twenties must remain incomprehensible; but if one assumes that it was drunk on bootleg liquor it will still be incomprehensible. It was a form of auto-intoxication induced by unwillingness to face reality of a changed world. But it was marked by many of the characteristic features of an alcoholic spree, notably its grandiose dreams, its nauseating sordidness, and its grotesque humors.

Its most grandiose dream was that of eliminating the major part of the evils of excess by forbidding the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages—not far removed from an orator charged with heroin denouncing the evil effects of caffeine in tea. Its most sordid spectacle was that of a convict serving time in prison for taking a bribe while he was a great officer of state, a member of the President's Cabinet. Its humors were innumerable, raucous and sometimes lurid, but undoubtedly amusing. Two of its typical heroes were a bandit and a bishop, the bandit a purveyor of illegal liquor, the bishop head of the organization most conspicuous among the supporters of prohibition. Eventually the bandit, one "Scarface Al" Capone, went to jail for evading the income tax. The bishop was indicted before the civil courts for violating the Corrupt Practices Act, but was acquitted; and was charged in the ecclesiastical courts with adultery and stock-market gambling, but never convicted. Yet it is highly improbable that either the career made by Bishop James Cannon, Jr., or that of Scarface Al would have been possible under any other conditions than those prevailing in the Twenties.

The economic and political philosophies of the time were equally those of a roaring drunk. The badly plastered character's delusion that he is a man of unlimited wealth is an old, familiar story, but it was the working theory of American business in the years following 1920. It was based on the old superstition of some magic potency in a promissory note. Throughout this period we persisted in carrying as assets the paper of various bankrupt European nations, although within a year or two it was as plain as the noonday sun that it could never be redeemed.

On that we piled a refusal to acknowledge that the United States' vast expenditure of treasure, to say nothing of blood, had

actually depleted our resources. The war had been paid for, as wars are always paid for, on the spot. The steel, the food, the textiles, the chemicals, the lumber, the rubber, and the petroleum necessary in waging it had been consumed. All that remained was a mere book-keeping arrangement to distribute the loss so that it would fall upon those who could neither escape it nor pass it along to someone else.

But instead of going about this realistically and making the readjustment as rapidly as possible, we clung to the fiction that we could somehow push the actual loss into the future. So we persisted in playing around with our prettily-engraved shares in worked-out gold mines and oil wells long gone dry. We sent abroad many ingenious gentlemen to work out Young Plans and Dawes Plans and various other plans, all of them devices to squeeze blood out of a turnip. All the while our own economy was deteriorating with accelerating speed until the whole system fell in ruins about our ears in 1929.

The political philosophy was equally fantastic. In a word, it was Neronic—to fiddle while Rome burned. The idea was put in a later idiom by a homespun philosopher; it was to win domestic elections by "crossing hell on a rotten rail." The bumbling old fool who succeeded Wilson as President of the United States called it "normalcy." It was, of course, the opposite. It was the recoil from reality that is the hall-mark of the neurotic, the alcoholic, and the psychotic, all of which it is the high, if sometimes despairing, endeavor of psychiatry to prove, are abnormal states.

It is against this background that the literature, the music, and the graphic arts of the Twenties must be examined if they are to be thoroughly understood. John Held's baby-faced punks and nymphos, and the despairing squall of Carol Kennicott, heroine of *Main Street*, are superficially unrelated, but they are identical in that they are both protests against a world of drunken fantasy in which the moral order was turned upside down.

But it is a very grave mistake, in my opinion a fatal mistake, to assume that this moral upheaval consisted entirely, or principally, in social toleration, not to say acceptance, of fornication and alcoholism. It went far deeper than that. Indeed, it may be argued with considerable plausibility that frank recognition of

the existence of the bawdy and the drunken was one of the healthier manifestations of the spirit of the time. After all, *Fanny Hill* had been in circulation well over a century before the Twenties arrived; and if *Lady Chatterley's Lover* reduced that sort of thing to a mere episode in human existence, rather than its chief aim and object, who will deny that the effect was an improvement?

The deep damnation of the Twenties was not its revolt against conventions that were largely fraudulent, but its failure to revolt against the most vicious of all frauds, the theory that if we shut our eyes to unpleasant reality maybe it will go away. The world order of 1914 had been shattered beyond repair and sober men—Woodrow Wilson for a conspicuous example—saw plainly the necessity of rebuilding it from the ground up. The Russian revolution had happened. It wasn't a theory, it was a fact, and it brought in its train a great many unpleasant conditions to meet which meant for us great labor and expense.

Therefore the majority of us shut our eyes to the fact—or, rather, we got too drunk on the theory of "normalcy" to be able to perceive the fact—and for fourteen years refused to admit officially that Communist Russia existed. The economy of scarcity also was shattered, and in an economy of abundance the problem of production yields priority to the problem of distribution. But to adjust to this fact also meant labor and expense; so we shut our eyes to it and brought upon ourselves an unnecessary because avoidable period of famine and desperation such as we had never endured before. The inevitable and inexorable penalty of the Twenties was the Thirties; and everyone who lived through that period must shudder at the thought.

For while history never repeats any phase exactly, it does have a cyclic tendency and we may say of whatever has happened once that something very like it may happen again. The refusal to recognize officially the existence of Red China is not exactly a repetition of the refusal to recognize Red Russia but it is similar. In the Fifties we are not pinning our faith to any large extent on written promises to pay, but we are pinning it to "massive retaliation" which is itself a sort of promise to pay not, indeed, in money, but in hell-fire springing from the fusion of the atom. It is a question whether Mr. Dulles' phrase, "massive retaliation," is a

whit more realistic than Mr. Coolidge's phrase, "they hired the money, didn't they?" If one is in fact as great a departure from relevance as the other, wherein is our present mode of thought superior to the drunken raving of the Twenties?

This much, at least, is certain—in the Twenties the arch-heresy was the suggestion that the old order was shattered completely and should be replaced by a new one based on collective security as represented by the League of Nations. Even such stout conservatives as William H. Taft and Herbert Hoover were shouted down when they proposed it. In the Fifties the arch-heresy is what is called Un-American Activity, which is in essence a suggestion that the old order is shattered and should be replaced by a new one based on the theory that Communism does exist and is likely to be here for a long time. This raises in the modern American mind the doubt that troubled Omar Khayyam:

Indeed, indeed repentance oft before
I swore—but was I sober when I swore?

If the answer is in the negative, we arrive at an odd conclusion: while the *decor* and the stage properties are entirely different, the theme of the drama and the style of acting are unchanged; so if you want to see the Twenties as they were essentially, look around you.

George H. Foster*

LITERATURE IN THE TWENTIES

Those of us who went through the dismal Thirties as young men are not too easily charmed by the noisy Twenties. Looking back without some stirring of uneasiness and disapproval is hardly a matter of sweet simplicity. There is still a feeling of picking up the check for a party to which we had not been invited. Pay somebody and the snow goes away, does it? We had never been to Babylon at all.

Or barely within the gates when that wicked city fell. I recall the dark afternoon of the first big crash in the market when, just out of high school, I worked as a messenger for one of the Wall Street brokerage houses. Naive as I was, I remember with some terror the grey-faced, frightened floor clerks coming back to the office from the exchange, overcome with fatigue and hopelessly confused by their own transaction slips. And that night the messengers from the financial district roaming the narrow streets in packs, hooting and yelling in their bewilderment, stirred by some vague resentment of their masters. I heard my employer later assure his friends over genuine-imported-right-off-the-boat Scotch that the whole affair was purely psychological, purely psychological. So, even at this time and this distance, the memory is one of fear, of a feeling somebody was dreadfully to blame. Who was it? The Mitchells and the Whitneys? The bootblacks in the market on margin? The writers—the Irresponsibles? We read of Max Bodenheim murdered in the Village. The last, uninvited guest has at last fulfilled himself, the moral order is restored. Sinclair Lewis dies obscurely, Mencken occupies himself with linguistics, Fitzgerald is forgotten in the Thirties, Dos Passos recants as he should have long before. So much for them. The waiter has at last delivered the tab, snickering.

Mostly nonsense, to be sure. The gaudy surface trappings of

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the Twenties conceal the quality of the writing and the dedication of the writers. As Professor Hoffman says, the best of the literary people "were 'whole men' in the genuine sense of being profoundly concerned with the moral value of literary form. Essential to the enlightenment the decade gave us was that sense of the significance of the aesthetic, of its essential nature. Such a preoccupation appears on the surface to be morally irresponsible; actually it is truly moral in the sense of its earnest desire to communicate the variants of the human condition." There were hard-working people experimenting with form in poetry, the drama, and the novel because they believed in what they were about. Mencken has his sport with the Worst American State; shortly, hardly to the bewilderment of someone like William Alexander Percy, Mississippi had its cluster of remarkable writers and Mr. Faulkner his joke. (Allowing, after the perhaps hostile question, that since Mississippians can't read, nothing remains for them but to write.) There was the famous activity around Nashville, the flood of little magazines, the relative ease of getting published. This before the lavish foundation grants, the generous fellowships, the writer-in-residence.

What may irk us most about the Twenties is the generally acid criticism of the United States, deserved or not. At least it irks those who feel they faced the economic hazards of the Thirties and had to act, not run off to Europe. Even that is distorted, of course. The best of the expatriates were engaged, exhibiting really the same historic concern for our situation that Thoreau described in 1848: "The American," he said, "has dwindled into an Odd Fellow—one who may be known by the development of his organ of gregariousness, and a manifest lack of intellect and cheerful self reliance . . ." It is an old complaint; Cooper, Mark Twain, Whitman worried about us in much the same way. The attitude was more widespread and violent in the Twenties as the young people reacted to what Mr. Mizener calls "the extraordinary tension [American life] sets up between our passion to understand and evaluate our experience for ourselves, and our need to belong to a community that is unusually energetic in imposing its understanding and values on its individual members."

So the Twenties was a time of earnest reappraisals, some inspired, most of them militant; the Jeffersonian reinterpretations,

the Marxist view of the American revolution, the "pragmatic acquiescence," the "betrayal of Whitman's vision," the views that led to the flight from crass, drab, Main-Street United States. And the search for fulfillment in art since the vulgarity of life here denied it in any other form.

The Twenties popularized that new scapegoat, the American Woman Rampant. If the European woman was domineering, matriarchal, selfish, bluestocking, alcoholic—why, that was in the tradition: she was strong, earthy, and disdained deodorants. Fitzgerald's girls made the readers whoop and holler; they still do. Dodsworth trades in his permanent-waved, culture-crazed, sanitary U. S. wife for the relaxed, cultivated European and becomes the most happy fellow. So we were later to have the Thurber cartoons, Philip Wylie, the (no doubt) convenient complaints of American soldiers abroad in World War II, Kinsey reports, and similar sensations. Henry James's Boston nymphs become the real Zelda Fitzgeralds, the fictional Fran Dodsworths, the Paris representatives of *Vogue*, all raising hob in Europe, contrasting dismally with their betters abroad. Maybe the new American woman has her peculiar qualities. (Vegetables, said the old commentators, grow large and luscious in the New World but lack the savor of our native produce.) At any rate, the Twenties gave the girls a hard time, despite the appearance then of more distinguished women writers than at any time before. Aunt Sally was gone, the well of loneliness filling up.

Much of this helped swell the historic American inferiority complex, especially the loud brawling protests against the leveling effects Whitman was so well aware of but refused to concede would destroy us. It is true that for Lewis, Mencken, Dreiser, Jeffers, the battle was all but lost and the religious element in democracy derided. Well, they were cleaning house, some of them eager to set fire to it. "Our novelists . . . concern themselves with the more smiling aspects of life, which are the more American, and seek the universal in the individual rather than the social interests . . . The manners of the novel have been improving with those of its readers; that is all." Thus Howells in 1889 and the lads in the Twenties took care of him. They gave us the Scowling, the Frustrated, the Retreating, the Farewell-to-All-That American.

Gopher Prairie was every American small town; the lordly Hudson was befouled. Everybody looked at the spoiled green hills through the eyes of Gatsby's chonicler and Miniver Cheevy did all there was left to do. A good deal of this was naive, of course, but the writers were at least concerned. "The writers of the Twenties," says Hoffman, "believed in everything, those of the 1930's in only one thing, those of the 1940's in nothing." For better or worse, the loudest critics of America were not ignored in their time. The softer one like William Carlos Williams went about their work, though it was no time for complete detachment.

Still, the quarrel with America was an old one, perhaps between lovers. Admitting the crucial nature of the tension between 1920 and 1930 and the extravagant, irrational responses to it, the amount of distinguished writing produced in the decade is impressive. The literature of those years is what we study, ponder, write about now, outside and inside the academy. In spite of the usual dismal best-sellers, we had poets, dramatists, novelists of interest and even distinction. Let us concede that at no time were writers of stature so scornful of their land; not even the Thirties produced such disparagement, so complete a renunciation. Let us concede, too, that those writers who seemed most engaged, who provoked so much chatter among the middlebrows, seem strident now. We may even concede that the vast, ugly spectacle of the United States in the Twenties deserved some of their wrath. But we did have the dedicated writers, moralists in the best sense, and the emergence of a literary criticism that might have pleased even Henry James.

James I. Greene*

PAINTING IN THE TWENTIES

A Symposium

The Twenties constitute one of the liveliest periods in American painting. As one of the contributors to this symposium notes, "the Academy was very dead," and there was "an aliveness and zest in life" on the part of the artist.

Rather than submit this decade of painting to the formality of an historical or critical survey, the editors decided to ask a representative number of painters who were active in the Twenties to express their opinions on a series of questions. Some of the questions asked were consciously framed to draw forth opinions of the painters about their fellow-artists; some of the painters deftly avoided commitment on such matters.

An arbitrary list of distinguished living painters of the Twenties was drawn up, and each of the seven artists on the list was invited to participate in the symposium. The seven chosen were:

Thomas Hart Benton

Charles Burchfield

Stuart Davis

Edward Hopper

Georgia O'Keeffe

Ben Shahn

Charles Sheeler

Burchfield, unfortunately ill, could not participate; Miss O'Keeffe declined. The replies of the other five ranged from full, sometimes explanatory, remarks to concise and minimum statements.

In addition to the five painters of the generations of the Twenties, four other artists have contributed to the symposium. These four are not only themselves painters, but are professors of art in American colleges. Their answers to the questions of the symposium are not inhibited by the disinclination to pass judg-

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ment on contemporaries, for the Twenties are now three decades removed from us. The four contributors from the colleges are:

John Ballator, Hollins College
 Horace Day, Mary Baldwin College
 Marion Junkin, Washington and Lee University
 Charles Smith, University of Virginia

In the answer to the first question, the five painters of the Twenties are arranged alphabetically, and their answers are followed in alphabetical order by the four professor-artists. In the succeeding sections, the answers are given in whatever order seems to the editor most logical. The words and the style of each artist are retained.

THE SYMPOSIUM

1. What painters of the 1920's do you consider, thirty years later, to be most significant and impressive?

BENTON: I have indeed made judgments, and plenty of them, in my time, but not upon individual artists or upon their work. Rather these judgments have been directed more to the fields of analysis and to the "philosophy" of art, to ideas, concepts, notions, influences, etc., affecting individual artists perhaps, but only as they chose to regard themselves as affected. So, at this late date I'm not going to start naming names nor do I want to pick out any of the works of my contemporaries of the twenties as "aesthetically superior."

There were a number of artists of the time whose performance aroused my interest. It was rarely, however, that that interest rested on aesthetic qualities alone. Very early in the twenties I became convinced that mere aesthetic meanings and qualities constitute too fragile a ground on which to build an American art of much consequence. In spite of a constant, and often public, preoccupation with formal problems, technical rather than properly aesthetic, the core of my thinking about art became directed socially rather than aesthetically. Instead of looking toward its further emancipation from non-aesthetic meanings I wanted to see art re-engaged with these. Subject matter in this view was seen, not as a restrictive, but as a motivating factor.

DAVIS: Glenn O. Coleman.

HOPPER: The symposium you project, when completed through

answers to the questions, will please the layman and even those more sophisticated who would like to know who is greater than who. But these questions are too difficult for an artist to answer with any assurance.

SHAHN: If I were to select three painters who had an unmistakable impact on American art, they would probably be Stella, Dove, and Marin. "We inevitably bring to the contemplation or enjoyment of art . . . a number of characteristically twentieth-century evaluations. They are fortuitous values. They may be within the work or they may be within the viewer. Such values are the passing vagaries of taste."*

SHEELER: Marin, Dove, Davis.

BALLATOR: George Bellows, despite the unevenness of his work, and John Marin, despite the narrow compass of his reach.

DAY: John Marin, Charles Demuth, William Glackens, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Charles Burchfield.

JUNKIN: John Marin (his work seems most enduring—beyond time and era); Reginald Marsh (the gusty humanity in his work is of the roaring twenties); Stuart Davis (because he used jazz and was most ahead of his time); George Luks (he was the last of the "Eight," a last fine flourish of the preceding generation).

SMITH: John Marin, Edward Hopper, Karl Knaths.

2. Does any one artist (or two or three) sum up American painting in the 1920's, as Fitzgerald and Hemingway do in fiction and Gershwin does in music?

BALLATOR: Bellows, in my estimation, "sums up" painting at least as well as do Fitzgerald and Hemingway fiction, Gershwin music. My feeling is that the "summing up" is specious; none of the nominees has scope enough to "sum up" in my dictionary.

DAY: Henri, Luks, Bellows make a trio that typify realism in the 20's.

*This quotation and several others that follow in the comments of Mr. Shahn were drawn from his lectures at Harvard University, published under the title, *The Shape of Content* (Harvard University Press, 1958). All quotations from this book have been authorized by Mr. Shahn and are used by permission of the Harvard University Press. The present comment appears on p. 107.

JUNKIN: Reginald Marsh, in a pictorial sense, illustrated the free swinging times.

SHAHN: (The artist) was not then in search of a wide public really, not as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Gershwin were; he was undertaking his experiments and his declarations within an almost monastically removed, small special circle of people.

SHEELER: I do not think so. There were groups of similar intent making their contributions. Just as Fitzgerald and Hemingway, while conspicuous, were not necessarily a summation.

DAVIS: No.

SMITH: No.

BENTON: (Unanswered)

HOPPER: (Unanswered)

3. What were the chief influences on painting from Europe in the decade?

SHAHN: "There is little art being produced today that does not bear some imprint of the great period of the 'Isms' when painting was freed from that academic dictatorship which laid down so many rules about form and content. Every branch of the rebellion of the Isms had . . . a content of ideas, and that content charted the course which it would pursue, as Cubism, for instance, pursued the cube, the cone, and the sphere, as Surrealism pursued the subconscious, and Dadaism, perversity."*

SHEELER: The Post-Impressionists, Fauves, and some Old Masters.

DAY: Manet; however, Cezanne and the Post-Impressionists dominated those who seem to be most significant today.

JUNKIN: Cezanne's importance was being understood by a large number of students. The surprising thing is that the European influences were not very strong at this time, except in the work of Max Weber, Davis, and a few other painters.

DAVIS: Cubism.

SMITH: The 1913 Armory Show.

*Shahn, *The Shape of Content*, p. 63 (by permission).

BENTON: European influences, encouraging as they did a purely aesthetic Art, were building up in the critical and artistic mind of America. It also was not popular with that mind, appearing retrogressive and perhaps presumptive.

I was not, however alone in my thinking. Other artists, partly, maybe, because of a revived interest in the Americanist environmentalism of the "Ash Can" school, so eclipsed by the famous Armory Exhibition, partly because of certain intellectual upheavals of the time, had come to somewhat similar views and by the middle twenties American Regionalism was born. This movement did not get its name or receive its publicity until the thirties, but it came directly from the ferments of the years preceding. As a matter of fact, all its essential directions were then indicated.

BALLATOR: Two which occur to me seem to be an interest in the more decorative (and this was so general and widely diffused I'd make little of it) and an interest in the bold stroke painting, vaguely inherited from Munich—Düvenick, Henri, Luks, etc.

HOPPER: (Unanswered)

4. Do you detect a new idiom or distinctive style in American art during the 1920's, as characteristic of America as jazz in music? If so, how could it be defined?

SHEELER: Yes. An awareness of new directions ahead to be explored with an American slant, with a renewed observation of some of the Old Masters and further acquaintance with contemporary French art, as well as with the so-called Primitive Arts.

BENTON: Though we tend to think of the twenties as a brokers' holiday and a bootlegger's and jazz babies' carnival, it was also a time of much questioning about and of much probing into our American history and social culture. The post-war scene did not suit everybody. Many, like the artists, did not participate in its benefits, but debates on its nature were constant. American sociology engaged popular interest at the time, and was even institutionalized as in New York's New School for Social Research. American philosophy, psychology, and history were revived. It was the time of William James, John Dewey, and Thorstein Veblen; it saw the rise of the new popular historians like Beard and

Adams and the resuscitation of Turner's frontierism. It was the time also when Marxist theories, first widely applied to the interpretation of America, brought on a furious research into our cultural past. One of the consequences of this should interest you Virginians. Along with the omnipresent jazz drum beat, the Appalachian folk song began to be heard. Cecil Sharp came into his own. American folk song festivals were set up and folk myths of the backwoods re-established in the public mind. Also our political mythology, which every culture must have to find its way into a future, was brought under new scrutiny and into violent debate. The time, in spite of its blatant surface materialism, was one of constantly accelerated interest in the *meaning* of America past and present.

It was natural that such interest find artistic expression. And it did find it in Regionalism. Although the movement is now "dead as the dodo," it dominated the American scene during the late twenties and during all of the thirties and was so persuasive that even artists to whom its nationalistic aspects were repugnant followed its tenets unconsciously and in spite of themselves. (Salons of Independent Artists, New York.). Its subject matter became the predominant subject matter of the W.P.A. and Treasury Department murals of the Roosevelt regime and for a decade it filled American painting exhibitions with more busted-down barns and bow-legged farmers than ever existed. Like all movements, it had its bandwagon followers to make a joke of it, but it aroused an unprecedented popular interest as a review of the journals of the time testify. It was monetarily successful as well. Thus, if the artistic impulses of the twenties are to be considered for their effectiveness in and on our American social scene, Regionalism must be given first place.

BALLATOR: My feeling is that there is a distinctive style but that it would be as hard to describe verbally as is the American jazz so to describe. In the case of jazz, the playing of a few numbers should "describe" it; in the paintings, seeing a number of works should do it too. The same recognition phenomenon operates in differentiating an Ingres hand from a David, and would operate to differentiate an American work from Canadian, French, . . .

DAY: Marin found in Cezanne the key to a dynamic rhythmic energy which he expressed in a style of painting that might be compared to syncopation. It is a quality, which in Marin, Demuth, and Hartley is typically American.

SHAHN: "(An artist may) interpret Jazz—an idea, a content—by abstracting out of a confusion of figures and instruments just the staccato rhythms and the blare. In Stuart Davis' painting of jazz, for example, or in Matisse's, blaring sound becomes color; rhythm of timing becomes rhythm of forms."*

JUNKIN: No. There was a greater freedom in paint (the Academy was very dead) and an aliveness and zest in life. Most painting was about life, but it had not jelled into a style. Most painters retained their individualism.

I regret that I saw only a part of the "roaring twenties" in New York, as I reached there in the summer of 1927. What I saw was wonderful and human and exciting in every way, the human interest of the twenties was more interesting than the impersonal, dehumanized, Abstract-Expressionism of today. Contrasting an art catalogue of one of the big exhibitions of the twenties with one today will bring out the fact that while much of the earlier painting was bad in a formal sense, it had a vital interest in people, and you knew who was painting and why. Today's paintings have an intense interest in form and pattern, but are dehumanized to an almost terrible degree, and one cannot tell who painted most of them.

DAVIS: Nothing.

SMITH: No.

HOPPER: (Unanswered)

5. Did the artist feel in the Twenties that he was fighting a battle for a new art? Did he tend to regard himself as a "starving artist" in that rich decade?

BENTON: Beyond its temporary public effectiveness, Regionalism posed some questions which endure. These, revolving about the relation of the artist's private meanings of the society in which he lives and on which he depends for encouragement and support, bear upon the very endurance of art itself as a factor of professional consequence in society. The abstractionism, the pure pattern making, against which Regionalism reacted in the twenties and to which it was opposite, finally won out in our American artistic drives and succeeded it. Overcoming the European influences, too pat-

*Shahn, *The Shape of Content*, p. 64 (by permission)

ent in the twenties, there is now an American abstract art which can be said to stand on its own feet. It is more than a mere attenuation. A Jackson Pollock, to use one name, could only have come out of America. His work cannot be but remotely tied to European precedent.

Nevertheless, the social question, inherent in the Regionalist movement, remains unanswered. In some form it is bound to come up again. When it does, a new kind of aesthetic, different from that now prevailing, may find a more attractive monument than that now accorded the demise of Regionalism. Who knows?

DAY: The "new art" in the 20's generally denoted a vigorous earthy realism. Painters starved but did not expect relief except from private philanthropy.

SHAHN: The artist in the twenties in America *was* isolated and *was* poor. "The artist occupies a unique position vis-a-vis the society in which he lives. However dependent upon it he may be for his livelihood, he is still somewhat removed from its immediate struggles for social status or for economic supremacy. He has no really vested interest in the status quo." "Every successive change in the look of art . . . has been at issue with whatever mode was the then prevailing one." "I remember the Paris of the twenties when the cafes teemed with tales of the still-to-be-created New World, and when every smallest aesthetic deviation had its own political manifesto."*

SHEELER: There most likely were artists, in fact I know of some of them, who wasted their time luxuriating in fostering the idea that they were martyrs for a cause. That is a non-productive occupation. I witnessed many artists who, having decided to become artists, assumed that the world owed them a living. Why? The world demands bread as a basic necessity of all—which is not true of art. There were those who, having decided on their vocation, accepted as necessary providing their bread by other means until such time as their products produced a demand.

JUNKIN: I cannot state what the artists were thinking, as I was fighting for the rudiments of drawing and technique. As for starving, I took care of that by working in a restaurant.

SMITH: Not that I know. Never met one.

DAVIS: No.

*Shahn, *The Shape of Content*, pp. 79, 78, 82 (by permission).

BALLATOR: (Unanswered)

HOPPER: (Unanswered)

6. If you could own three American paintings done in the Twenties (for your aesthetic satisfaction, not for present monetary value), which three should you choose?

SHAHN: If I were to choose three pictures entirely for my own satisfaction, they would include the work of Marin and Stella. My third choice would be a painting of Marsden Hartley's; he perhaps had not so much impact on art as Dove, but he was a greater artist across a wider span of time than was Dove.

DAY: John Marin—"Mountain Top" (water color)
Yasuo Kuniyoshi—"Still Life" (oil)
Joseph Stella—"Brooklyn Bridge" (oil)

SMITH: John Marin—"Lower Manhattan"
Edward Hopper—"House by the Railroad"
Karl Knaths—"Cock and Glove"

JUNKIN: Yasuo Kuniyoshi—"Little Joe with Cow" (1923)
John Marin—"The Harbor," "Deer Island," "Maine and
Pertaining Thereto" (1927)
Reginald Marsh—"Burlesque" (1926)

This question is difficult because there is a great difference between selecting a painting for personal reasons and choosing a great or significant painting for a museum. As an example, "The Noble Experiment," by George Luks, is an important painting in that it sums up the speakeasy, rum-running era. I saw this painting undergo many phases in the studio before it was signed. It started out as an outdoor fruit-stand with the "white wing" and a cop swapping yarns; other characters were added, most of whom appeared in the studio in person. The fact that George Luks was drunk a good bit of the time certainly added to the zest of the painting, if not to the art. Gradually the scene shifted to an indoor one, the fruit-stand vanished, and the speakeasy appeared. As to ownership, that is another matter, and I know of other paintings by Luks I would rather live with—besides, "The Noble Experiment" would hardly fit in my living room.

BALLATOR: One of the (early of course) Kuniyoshis; a small Alexander Brook still life; a Henry Lee McFee still life or figure with still life.

HOPPER: If the work of Thomas Eakins came within the scope of the work of the 1920's, I would very much like to own any of his work, as I admire him greatly and believe he is our greatest artist. (Editor's Note: Eakins died in 1914.)

DAVIS: I don't collect.

SHEELER: I omit, believing it does not rate an answer.

BENTON: (Unanswered)

Bruce Simonds*

MUSIC IN THE TWENTIES

In the field of music, the third decade of the twentieth century presents a diversity of aims and styles which at first sight is bewildering. There can have been few decades in which were published compositions so radically different as the *Sonata Noble* of John Powell and the *Concord Sonata* of Charles Ives. For this state of things the immense extent of the American scene and its far from homogeneous population are doubtless responsible; and the cataclysm of the first World War produced a ferment of thought which made itself felt in music as well as in the other arts.

The amount of music composed in the decade was enormous, but the public can know music only when it is performed and published. Some of the important American orchestras gave a hearing to many new works: The Boston Symphony, for example, performed more than a hundred American compositions between 1920 and 1930, and the Chicago Orchestra more than a hundred and fifty. In both cases, not a few works were by composers with a purely local reputation, whose works did not become a part of the repertoire. Publishers must consider sales, and in the twenties most publishing houses tended to limit themselves to music of the conservative and popular types; a few smaller houses courageously issued more daring works.

Before the first World War, young composers had received their training as a rule from German teachers or from Americans who had studied in Germany. In the twenties, two teachers were especially influential: Bloch in Cleveland, and Nadia Boulanger in Paris. Sessions, Shepherd, Quincy Porter, Douglas Moore, and Jacobi were all students of Bloch; Aaron Copland, Moore, Virgil Thomson, and Roy Harris of Mlle. Boulanger. Both these eminent teachers succeeded in instilling enthusiasm in their students by introducing them to new rhythmic and harmonic procedures,

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while subjecting them to a rigorous contrapuntal discipline. Other composers evolved a style from observing the trend of music and were almost self-taught. Carl Ruggles can have owed little to Spalding at Harvard, Charles Ives little to Horatio Parker at Yale.

Since this survey will concentrate attention upon the new influences and trends during the twenties, it will omit any reference to the music, often admirable, of composers who may be called (with no suggestion of an invidious judgment) conservative, traditional, or academic. To these composers music was a medium of international expression, and they made no attempt to assert their Americanism by using specifically American materials. One does not look to them for radical experimentation.

As in American painting, many composers, especially those hailing from the West and South, began to be aware of the native scene and its artistic resources. They used materials derived from Indian and Negro sources, or from the folk-music of the Southern mountaineers, which had recently been collected by the Englishman Cecil Sharp and by Howard Brockway and Loraine Wyman, a talented singer who sang them all over America with great success.

Indian themes were used to some extent. Arthur Farwell in 1923 produced his *Navajo War Dance*; Henry Gilbert's *Indian Sketches* were first performed in 1921; Frederick Jacobi, having spent time observing the music of Pueblo Indians in Arizona and New Mexico, published his string quartet on Indian themes in 1926.

Negro melodies had been used by American composers ever since Dvorak set the fashion in his *New World Symphony* as far back as 1893, though Dvorak's themes may be simply imitations. By 1920, after the pioneer work of Henry T. Burleigh, himself a Negro, the movement was in full swing. Henry Gilbert's *Comedy Overture on Negro Themes* had been performed in 1911; he followed this up with *Dance in the Place Congo* (1920) and *Negro Rhapsody* (1924). Nathaniel Dett is chiefly remembered for his settings of Negro spirituals and for his sprightly *Juba Dance* for piano (1921). Among the larger compositions, John Powell's *Rhapsodie Nègre* (1919) for piano and orchestra must take first

place for its eloquent colorful orchestration. In others of his pieces there is clever suggestion of local color.

There is no question that jazz owes much to Negro music. William Grant Still, a Negro, began his work as an arranger of popular music for jazz orchestras. The germs of jazz are to be found in rag-time; Irving Berlin's *Alexander's Rag-time Band* appeared in 1912. But the term "jazz" seems to have been first used around 1916. Not until February 12, 1924, when Paul Whiteman gave his famous program in Aeolian Hall, New York, was jazz played in the concert hall.

The afternoon became historic, however, for the first performance of what was perhaps the most popular piece of the decade, Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. The languorous tunes of this composition (improvised, one might note, in ten days, and expertly orchestrated by Grofé) took hold immediately. Gershwin, a young man of 26, had already had immense experience in writing popular numbers for Broadway shows and had several hits to his credit, notably *Swanee*. He had an unerring ear for the predilections of the great American public in melody and harmony. His *Concerto in F*, written a year later than the *Rhapsody* and orchestrated by himself, exhibits the same traits: tunes which remain on one note while the harmony changes chromatically beneath (this stems from Liszt); full, syncopated, chromatically moving chords (Wagner plus syncopation); energetic dotted rhythms (from Negro sources); parallel fifths (from Debussy). The work makes its bow to classical concerto form by being in three movements. One may question its inclusion by Albert Coates (1930) in a list of the fifty best compositions of all time, but it undoubtedly has vitality. *An American in Paris* (1930) has a certain breeziness, but on the whole is less successful.

Composers of "serious" music were intrigued by jazz and toyed with it partly for sheer amusement, partly because they felt it to be a distinctively American element. One finds it a definite feature of John Alden Carpenter's *Krazy Kat* and Aaron Copland's *Jazz Concerto*; it is frequently imitated by Louis Gruenberg; and it even crops up, *mirabile dictu*, in pieces by Edward Burlingame Hill and Charles Martin Loeffler.

John Alden Carpenter has been called the most American of

composers, and certainly he has been interested in portraying different aspects of the American scene. His *Tango Américaine* appeared in 1921; *Krazy Kat* (also in 1921) was based on George Herrmann's cartoons which were appearing in many American newspapers; and his *Skyscrapers* (1926), with its depiction of the cacophony of modern life (it sounds less cacophonous in 1959), its insistent jazz rhythms and popular-type tunes, attracted considerable attention, being produced as a ballet in both New York and Munich and later for orchestra alone in several American cities and Paris. Like Charles Ives, Carpenter was primarily engaged in business.

Less concerned with proclaiming their Americanism were Daniel Gregory Mason, whose clarinet sonata reflects the music of Brahms; David Stanley Smith, whose violin sonata is an interesting contribution to chamber music; and Edward Burlingame Hill, whose *Lilacs* is peculiarly successful in evoking the fragrance suggested by Amy Lowell's poem. Ernest Schelling's *Victory Ball*, after Noyes, made a deep impression.

The search for new sources of inspiration included the Orient. Henry Eichheim made several journeys to eastern Asia and studied Oriental music assiduously, returning to America with themes and instruments, both of which he used in subsequent scores. *Oriental Impressions* (1928) utilize not only the conventional instruments, but such Oriental ones as a Chinese drum without snares, a large tam-tam and a fluctuating tam-tam, Chinese and ancient cymbals, marimba, and fish-head (a small wooden bell). The strange Oriental sonorities are faithfully reproduced, as are the melodies on Eastern scales with arabesques for wind instruments.

It would be impossible to omit from a discussion of music produced in America the works of Loeffler and Bloch, though neither was born on this side of the Atlantic. Practically all of Charles Martin Loeffler's music was written here, but it remains European and mainly French in composition, though he was attracted to jazz, and in 1927 wrote *Creole Blues*. The main inspiration of Loeffler's music, however, is ecclesiastical; he was a devout Catholic. His *Music for Four Stringed Instruments* is based on a Gregorian *Resurrexi*; his mysticism found its fullest expression

in his *Canticum Fratris Solis*, a setting for voice and orchestra of the Canticle to the Sun by St. Francis of Assisi.

Ernest Bloch's *Jewish Poems* (1916) aroused great interest. Here was music that was authentically Hebraic. Many of his compositions of the twenties had Hebrew titles and used Hebrew themes. Bloch had come to America in 1916 after recognition had been denied him in Europe. From the moment of his winning the Coolidge Prize and his establishment in Cleveland (1919) he began to exercise a stimulating influence on young composers who flocked to him for lessons. His quintet (1921-3) was remarkable in its day for the use of quarter-tones. Bloch moved to San Francisco in 1925 and there produced an "epic rhapsody" for orchestra called *America*, whose score is intended to depict America from Indian times to 1926; it won a prize of \$3000 but has never been accepted by the public, although it embodies authentic Indian music, chanties, hymn tunes, Negro songs, and folk tunes.

In 1925 the Metropolitan Opera commissioned Deems Taylor to write an opera. *The King's Henchman*, with a text by Edna St. Vincent Millay, was completed the next year and performed February 11, 1927. Public and critics alike were enthusiastic. Lawrence Gilman called it the best American opera he had ever heard. Wagner's star had not yet declined in 1927, and Taylor's opera reflects the Wagnerian ascendancy: the story descends from *Tristan*; the composer uses leit-motives in the Wagnerian manner; even the harmony is Wagnerian; and there are many other derivations from Wagner. Taylor, fortunate in his librettist, proved that English can be a singable language.

American music suffered a serious loss in the early death of Charles Tomlinson Griffes, most of whose few compositions were published posthumously. Originally French in inspiration, he was evolving a new style when his output tragically ceased. His piano sonata, based on a kind of Oriental scale with augmented seconds, is poetic and eloquent.

Howard Hanson, who became director of the Eastman School in 1924 and in this position has done much for his contemporaries, wrote two large symphonies, the *Nordic* and the *Romantic*, in this decade. Roy Harris's piano sonata breathes a distinctly Western atmosphere. Douglas Moore first attracted attention with his

witty *Pageant of P. T. Barnum*. Roger Sessions, a very intelligent composer, produced a highly interesting score in his incidental music to Andreyev's play, *The Black Maskers*. Aaron Copland was prolific during the period; his *Jazz Concerto*, written two years after the *Rhapsody in Blue*, suggests a much later time in its harsh dissonance. The exciting complex rhythms and exquisite second movement of Quincy Porter's second violin sonata have ensured repeated performances. The success of Walter Piston and Randall Thompson belong to the succeeding decades.

Virgil Thomson made his name in 1928: in that year he wrote an opera on Gertrude Stein's libretto, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, which was produced with a great deal of cellophane in 1934. It is a perfect setting of a text which we are assured has a meaning. Thomson is in a class by himself: his music is of a highly sophisticated simplicity, generally diatonic, but frequently unexpected and with a strong sense of irony. He is fond of taking the most unlikely material: he wrote a symphony on a hymn tune in 1928.

Several bad boys appeared in the decade; some of them have later repented their "atrocities." Leo Ornstein's *Wild Man's Dance* for piano, although written before 1920, seemed at that time the *ne plus ultra* of incoherent dissonance with its clusters of notes and its furious rhythm. By 1930 he had so far recanted as to write a hymn *America* which won the prize offered by the National Anthem Society. George Antheil's *Ballet Mécanique* shocked sensitive ears in 1924. Perhaps it does not seem as cacophonous today as it did then, but it does not seem to say anything very significant. But Antheil's music is still able to arouse hisses. Henry Cowell, like Ornstein, used tone-clusters sometimes produced with the forearm; and like Ornstein, his work has become less radical as the years advanced.

Other radical composers were Wallingford Riegger and Carl Ruggles. The former started as a conservative, winning the Paderewski prize in 1921 and the Coolidge prize in 1924; but by 1927 his *Study in Sonority* for ten violins "or any multiple thereof" proclaimed his interest in what is called atonal writing. Ruggles also began by adhering to traditional models, but in 1923 he became director with Edgar Varèse and Carlos Salzedo of the International Composers' Guild. He is inspired by the lofty sen-

timents of poets like Blake and Whitman to write highly chromatic, difficult atonal music in *Men and Mountains* (1924), *Portals* (1926), and *Men and Angels* (1930).

No composer excited more lively controversy than Edgar Varèse, whose *Hyperprism*, *Amérique*, and *Intégrales* used percussion instruments to a hitherto unprecedented extent. He was to go on in 1931 to write *Ionisation* for percussion alone.

Charles Ives is the most startling phenomenon in American music. Like the poet Wallace Stevens, he was engaged in business, but he wrote more music in his spare moments than many professional composers. Apparently he made no attempt to put it into print until 1920 when he was 46 years old. At this time appeared the *Concord Sonata* in four movements, Emerson, Hawthorne, the Alcotts, Thoreau. It had been written from 1909 to 1915 and is an astonishing composition antedating in some respects the atonal writing of Schoenberg; much of it is unbarred and without key signature; ranging from wild fantasy to simple diatonic tunes; in its multitude of notes almost impossible of execution. Lawrence Gilman hailed it as "the greatest music composed by an American and the most deeply and essentially American in impulse and implication." If that is true we can only regret that its difficulties have made it almost unknown to the general public. The four notes of Beethoven's fifth symphony are constantly, perhaps too constantly, heard throughout the sonata, which Ives endeavored to explain in an essay printed at the same time.

Ives followed this work up in 1922 with a book of 114 songs, surely the largest and most heterogeneous collection ever published by any one composer at any one time. These range in date from 1888 to 1921; from the latter year alone there are twenty-nine. All harmonic styles are represented; the poets include Milton, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Wordsworth, Emerson, Rupert Brooke, Keats, Browning, Whitman, Whittier, Cowper, Moore, Goethe, Byron, Shelley, Rossetti, Kipling, Longfellow, Tennyson, and many more. A number of songs appear which the composer stigmatizes as of "little or no value" and which he asks should not be sung in public but given only to students as examples of what not to sing. But, says Ives, "A song has a few rights the same as other ordinary citizens. If it feels like kicking over an ash-can, a poet's

castle or the prosodic law, will you stop it?" In this book he confesses that he has "merely cleaned house."

It is difficult if not impossible to determine what of Ives' extraordinary output dates from this decade. Time will tell how much of it will last. But his star seems to be rising rather than waning.

As we review the achievements of the decade we can note several tendencies: first, an interest in writing for large orchestras with prominent percussion instruments, and with the piano very frequently used for its percussive or bell-like qualities. The development of the percussion section of the orchestra dates from as far back as Rimsky-Korsakov but undoubtedly received great impetus from the ballets of Stravinsky. Oriental percussive instruments, however, came into the orchestra as a fairly new development. The treatment of the piano as a solo instrument is also increasingly percussive. The whole stress of percussion points straight to what actually happened in 1931 with Varèse's *Ionisation*.

Rhythms became more flexible, with constant changes of measure, again a heritage from Stravinsky, and with increasingly complex cross-rhythms. Ostinato figures are often used. There is a wide divergence of opinion as to what constitutes a beautiful melodic line, but the influence of Debussy's recitative-like monotone as an aid to diction is widely felt. There is a great deal of chromaticism, tonal or atonal, and a groping toward the use of quarter-tones. Harmonies to intensify the higher overtones, sometimes in tone-clusters, make their appearance. The radical composers play with polytonality. In spite of Virgil Thompson, the general effect is toward complexity rather than simplicity, and the bogey to be feared is sentimentality. Music becomes less descriptive, more abstract.

Another bogey to be feared was imitation. The decade was marked, according to Leonard Bernstein, by an "acrid" emphasis on originality. This is perhaps natural in a civilization with such a multiplicity of voices. But there is no justification for assuming that the great composers of the past, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, ever consciously tried to be original. Their innovations sprang

from within. The search for originality at all costs seems to be a cul-de-sac.

And what are we to say concerning the disparity of style in a decade which saw the works of Chadwick and Ives produced at the same time? Obviously to conservative composers the writing of the radicals was incomprehensible. And it is still incomprehensible to a great portion of the public. In fact, one may wonder whether the gulf between tastes of the intelligentsia and the ordinary concert audience has ever been greater than from this time to the present. For out of this mass of compositions few of the larger works are played today. The most popular in 1959 is still *Rhapsody in Blue*. Is this a reflection on American taste or on the lasting appeal of this music to intelligent music lovers? Is this to be the result of our general restlessness and craving for novelty? One can understand a new composition making its way slowly, but in the past, thirty years have generally sufficed to win popular recognition. Or are the great American compositions languishing unpublished, unheard, in composers' desks, like the *St. Matthew Passion*?

The truth of the matter may be that in spite of prizes and conscious efforts to promote our music we have not yet evolved a real interest in the American composer. A few giants like Bach and Beethoven overstep the bounds of their frontiers and become universal, but in general the French instinctively prefer their own music, the Germans and Italians theirs. We are more cosmopolitan than they, if less chauvinistic. On the other hand, it may be that with all their immense intelligence, facility, and mastery of technique, our composers have somehow not penetrated to the heart of things.

Alma Stone*

A LITTLE SOLDIER OF THE UDC

Five years my senior, the little hat had come to my grandmother through a cash arrangement with the Bellas Hess Company of Chicago, Illinois. When it left the stockrooms of Bellas Hess, a popular mail-order house of the early nineteen hundreds, the hat had been a sailor, of the style called Merry Widow. As season after season had passed, however, my grandmother, neither merry nor widowed, though possessed of many other fine qualities, had cut the hat down until in 1922 it was of a style we in the bosom of the family called simply cowdab; we did not even bother to translate it into the Latin. But the Scotch in her line had been valiant as well as thrifty, and my grandmother still wore the hat in public, wearing it with an almost serene stateliness as though by so doing she honored not only the expert milliners of Bellas Hess and the succession of cooperative old Dominecks from which each season she snipped feathers for the hat's adornment—she honored the whole family.

To her family the little hat was a source at once of ridicule and of shame. To my Aunt Tenie, visiting from Lake Charles, bored as only one can be who has recently moved from a small town to a larger one and returned for a visit to the former, the little hat became on one very warm day in June an escape, a way to pass the time till she got back home to Mr. Ed and Lake Charles. Having rather late in life married Mr. Ed, a prosperous drummer whom other ladies had also sought, she had got used to society when they had moved from our home, Ben Dort, Texas, to Lake Charles, Louisiana.

"Here, wear it to the postoffice and see if you can start something in this darn slow poke town." Stooping, she set the little hat

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on my head. "Mama Lu's gone to choir practice and worn her sunbonnet. This doggone sun's hotter here than it is in Lake Charles."

Why she did not leave the hot air of Ben Dort for the preferred atmosphere of Lake Charles, I did not ask. Instead I submitted to the hat, for since she had been with us six weeks already and the elder members of the family no longer, after such an extended stay, felt the responsibility, the burden of entertainment on the long summer afternoons fell upon me. This, I think, was a thoroughly agreeable arrangement to my aunt, as it was only with me that she felt free to mention Mr. Ed, Precious, so often. It was indeed she, rather than I, who, each afternoon after the moist, futile nap, started the search for entertainment. (In Lake Charles there was always something to do.) Some days we drove to the cemetery, walking under the shading pecans and reading the tombs of those who though in some ways perhaps less fortunate than we, surely must have been cooler and less desperate for change. Some days we made divinity and sated ourselves as we played fan-tan in the porch swing, hoping vainly that some, or one or any, of the infrequent passersby on the road would blow up, burst into flames, or deport themselves in some equally diverting manner.

Yesterday we had called on Miss Rhoda Martin, a lone maiden with whom my aunt, some twenty years previous had attended Kidd Key College in Sherman, and under this guise of a purely social visit, watched her for a long time. Where did she hide her morphine? But she had put it over on us; she had taken a dip right in front of us and though the reaction—the spurious sprightliness, the bright red high on the cheeks, the deceptive calm—was too unmistakable for us to miss, we had not seen her in the act, a fact that had so patently pleased Miss Rhoda and so outdone my usually even-tempered aunt, that we had left with some stiffness on both sides.

Today it was the hat. A quick glance in the hall-tree mirror told me that it—the hat—had done nothing to diminish the impression of stubborn idiocy in the reluctant, rabbit-eyed little girl on whose helpless noodle it now sat like a gay old toad. Nevertheless, to please my aunt of whom I had become very fond during our intimate hours together, I got in the front seat of the

surrey with her. For in 1922 Aunt Tenie and I did not drive cars; we drove old King, a balding bay, instead. True, vehicles of an automotive nature passed us on the way—Mr. Sid Lanier's Overland, Miss Sally Kyle's Big Buick (vehicles that King regarded with the same regal disdain my grandmother regarded new hats)—and, in our own barn at home, in the stall next to King's, stood my Uncle Jeff's Hupmobile, harnessed for riders. But my aunt, rather than appear in the smaller cars of Ben Dort (in Lake Charles Mr. Ed drove a Pierce Arrow), now chose the simplicity of the surrey, and in a lazy walk we started off on our trip to the postoffice that day.

"I got to get a few stamps," said Aunt Tenie. "Mr. Ed in Lake Charles says I'm not writing enough. These doggone cheap Ben Dort stamps been falling off the letters." She looked down at me then, smiling. "When you coming to Lake Charles with me, pre-ci-ous?"

"Precious" was a name I shared with Mr. Ed and often when she called me this, lingering over the name, making it a three syllable caress, pre-ci-ous, she was thinking of the other, calling him to her presence. I looked up at her now, trying to guess—was it me or Mr. Ed?

"There's lots of little girls there I'd like to introduce my favorite niece to." Strictly a non-talker, I still did not answer and Aunt Tenie, to take my mind off the hat and to show her gratitude for my company, kept the conversation going by herself. "The UDC have cute dances down there, hon," she said. "Sometimes they have children come and wear little Confederate uniforms. Kind of prance up and down between the dances, like regular soldiers. Unfurl little Confederate flags. You want to do that sometimes?"

Never. The United Daughters of the Confederacy would have to prance without me.

"Mr. Ed'll be glad to get you the uniform. All I got to do is ask him. He'll do anything I say."

Another word my aunt divided into extra syllables was Mr. E-ud, and at home, when we said his name we elongated it in her manner, making fun of my aunt, but she showed no resentment at this, for she was not an airish woman. She said it this way, not

as highfliers in Lake Charles might, to show their elegance in matters of pronunciation; this was only her way of bestowing on it all the lasting love in her large heart. Turning now she smiled and patted my hand. "Ever time those city kids prance down the aisle with the band playing, those little flags in the breeze, I keep wanting to see you in it, precious." When she gave my hand a squeeze I thought now it is the other, Mr. Ed, and I looked up again quickly from under the little hat, but before I could determine for a certainty King, using a method he had devised for disconcerting the flies, brushed his tail over the dashboard, and my aunt, removing her hand from mine, took the buggy whip and lifted the offending tail back over the board, a small but rather specialized operation she managed with considerable aplomb. Somehow this reminded her of her own black hair (she had formerly worn a switch), and she reached up and stroked the V-shaped line of stubby fringe at the nape of her neck.

"How you like this spiffy new shingle cut I've got, hon? Thelma Harris did it for me. Said she saw it in the Delineator on a recent trip. I'm gonna spring it on Mr. E-ud."

Looking up at my trusting aunt, I felt a fierce anger at Miss Thelma who it was well-known had been one of the many whose dreams of the glorious life in Lake Charles had been shattered when Mr. Ed had chosen Aunt Tenie. It was, I now realized, this short, close cropped fashion of wearing her hair that made my aunt look so much older than she had on her last visit, that made her proud nose appear a bleak and lonely sentinel in her stark, unshaded face, for the wearing of any covering for her head, even as a protection against the Ben Dort heat, was prohibited by the very newness of fashion itself—a fashion I doubted Miss Thelma, who probably wanted to see my aunt fall out in a sunstroke, had seen in the Delineator or anywhere else.

"This doggone little toot of a town doesn't even take the Delineator."

Before either King or I could properly register to this depressing announcement, my aunt, with a jolt that jarred the hat on my head, now pulled us, for the second day in a row, to a standstill in front of Miss Rhoda Martin's.

"Go in and show her the little hat," she ordered. "Keep your eyes open."

I meekly went up the walk to where Miss Rhoda, peering around the border of lardbuckets potted with geraniums and maidenhair fern, sat in her front gallery swing, drinking lemonade. She rose to greet me with a welcoming smile that after the sorry affair of yesterday I could only attribute to the excessive good manners for which, along with her jumpy and nervous disposition, she was noted.

"Why don't Tenie get out, too, hon? I iced up some teacakes." Miss Rhoda had high, pushed-back cheeks, giddy restless eyes; dressed today in a new white Dotted Swiss she seemed taller than I remembered her as having been yesterday. When, with her characteristic little rushing movement, she pulled me to her briefly in a spontaneous gesture of friendliness, the veins on her hands stood out in swollen, lavender rills. "Tenie had bad news from Lake Charles?"

"She's got to hold Old King." This was a very long sentence for me, also a lie, and accepting her hospitality I fortified myself with a teacake which, though of pure butter and of an excellent variety known locally as her Nice Little Cookie Cake, was somewhat lopsided, Miss Rhoda having obviously used the backend of a bent baking powder can as a cutter. Miss Rhoda, too attentive to my own wants to stress her own evident disappointment at Aunt Tenie's failure to appear for a return engagement, sat back in the swing by me and drank and chewed. If she noticed the little hat (and she must have, for she had almost knocked it skywinding when she had greeted me) or the fact that yesterday we had hitched Old King to the iron fence with no ill effects, she was too busy jumping up and down passing me the lemonade and teacakes to mention it. As I relaxed in the cool of the porch I could see Old King flapping his tail at the flies (larger and more pestiferous than those in Lake Charles, said my aunt) and Aunt Tenie as she now and then lifted the tail back over the dashboard, staring deeply into the Ben Dort heat.

"Tenie doing her hair a different way, ain't she, hon?" Miss Rhoda's own dark hair, as she turned to gaze through the ferns, was in a handsome, silken loop on her neck. I nodded, not wish-

ing to get too far into the subject, at which Miss Rhoda set down her glass and reaching the tips of her toes far back on the floor for leverage, swung us so violently for a moment that I had to cling not only to my glass but to the little hat as well. As we soared through the air past the maidenhair and the swamp fern, it struck me that Miss Rhoda had in mind to fling me to the floor for my part in the affair yesterday, that she had first wined and dined me so sumptuously in order to make my fall the more humiliating. Catching my frightened look, she let the speed die down and reaching over, gave me a convulsive little hug.

"Ain't another soul dropped by today and had a tune with me, punkin. Come on in and let's raise the rafters."

Though there were quite a few teacakes left on the plate, I rose and followed her happily inside the low-slung old house. In her parlor she sat down at her big upright piano (in Lake Charles I understood everybody had Baby Grands) and we sang from the Heart Songs book. To remind me of the tunes which I often forgot from visit to visit, she played a chorus of each before we lit into it—"Polly Wolly Doodle," "Buffalo Gals," then our favorite, "Bohunkus."

"Bohunkus was the name of one,
Josephus was the other's."

"Take a repeat, hon." Miss Rhoda struck the rich chords again. "Switch names."

And this time to give it a different twist we sang

"Josephus was the name of one,
Bohunkus was the other's."

As my heart swelled with song it seemed to me that never before had I sung so well or kept so effortlessly to the tune. Standing in the shadowed old parlor, bleating my soul out, I felt transported. Had Miss Rhoda's alto ever loomed so brilliantly above my faultless falsetto? Had we ever indeed raised the rafters so high? I thought not; once I was sure I saw the ceiling timbers lifting. I would not have been astonished to have seen Jesus, or even General Lee, floating there in the void. Perhaps the little hat is doing it, I decided; the music of my grandmother is in the little hat. And I swung impetuously into another verse, for in the

company of Miss Rhoda one was infected with the very lilt and dash of the woman herself—the stolen dip, the switching of names, the lopsided cookie cutter.

"Now let's make papa jump," she said, and that is what we did, for by pounding with extreme vigor the bass G above which the photographs of her deceased parents sat on top of the Baldwin, she could elevate Mr. Milt, her father, in his brown leather frame. The startled old gentleman having jumped and subsided, Miss Rhoda closed the piano. "Let's go finish up the lemonade and teacakes. I put in a whole lemon."

Back on the porch I sat in a wicker rocker facing her and the teacakes, the latter located on a small marble-topped table between the swing and the banister. From this vantage point, filled with a serenity I had never before known (it is the little hat again, I thought; the serenity of my grandmother is in the little hat), I loaded my lemon hull with sugar from the bottom of the glass and reached for a teacake. But in a surprise move in such direct contradiction to her customary lofty sense of hospitality that it caught me completely off guard, Miss Rhoda turned the plate around so that the majority of the remaining cakes were within her grasp, not mine. For a moment I looked at her, amazed. Then a foolish courage (my grandmother's, I decided, transmitted to me through the little hat) made me accept the challenge in her dark eyes. After a fruitless first thrust, I contrived a plan, where, by darting at frequent intervals to the banister, pretending each time only to be looking over to gauge the patience of my waiting aunt, but in actuality sideswiping the plate as I passed, I managed to hold my own in the contest for the cookies. Each time I scored Miss Rhoda seemed not displeased but as happy as I and encouraged me with many real smiles. When the little hat fell off in the rush, in true sportsmanlike manner she withheld her fire, her hands poised motionless over the plate until I had recovered the hat and replaced it on my head. But when we both reached for the last little cake, Miss Rhoda with an engaging smile and a determined scoop claimed it for her own.

"Tell your Aunt Tenie, hon, it'll take more than a hairdo to hold an old tom like Ed Williams."

I started guiltily; except for the abortive feints in her direction

when I sprinted to the banister I had all but forgotten my aunt. With the cake plate now empty and the lemon flavor fast waning from the ade (she had exaggerated about the whole lemon, I thought, but the teacakes in spite of their shape were uncommonly tasty) I rose to go. Miss Rhoda jumped up to start me on my way, for this, of course, had been her intention in mentioning my aunt, her interest in me and the game having disappeared with the last of the cakes.

"Come back to see me, hon." Once, in parting, she reached out as though to test her sanity, and almost touched the little hat. Is it true? asked the restless eyes. Can it be? Or is it the morphine again? But she withdrew her hand without touching the hat and patted me on the shoulder instead. "Be sure and come again, hon," she said.

And defeated again, worn out from my numerous mad dashes to the banister, defeated, yet somehow curiously bolstered by the unexpected turn entertainment had taken this day, I went slowly down the walk. Was it behind Mr. Milt Martin's picture? Was that the reason he jumped so high? Did she get it when she reached over to play the low notes of "Bohunkus"? Or had it been when she dipped like a swooping old dancer to remove the tiny scrap of paper from under the loud pedal?

"But, pre-ci-ous, I'm sure I never meant to accuse you of any such thing at all. A goodlooking man like you is bound to have lady friends crazy about him."

I climbed into the surrey and quietly took my seat by Aunt Tenie's side. For I knew from sad experience she had sent me alone into Miss Rhoda's not because she considered herself bested in that quarter, but because she had had to be by herself for a while to think of Mr. Ed. All of a sudden, the Ben Dort heat buzzing like live bees in her ears, it had come over her that she must have him to herself for a moment. Precious. Oh, pre-ci-ous.

"Now, pre-ci-ous, you know I don't believe half those stinking things I hear."

How about the swing, I wondered? Could it have been in the swing anywhere? She had been pretty particular about sitting on her side of the swing.

"After all, I can always go get a job clerking in Beaumont, pre-ci-ous."

At this I looked at my aunt, alarmed. Without turning or allowing her eyes to meet mine, she lifted Old King's tail back over the dashboard and clucked a soft "Gid-dap, sir" to him. "Any luck?" I shook my head. "I imagine it's in one of those dog-gone flower pots somewhere," she said.

"She sure liked the little headgear," I said.

"That's good." But the fun had gone out of it for her and the same hot flash that now warned me never again to eat teacakes at Miss Rhoda's, also told me that Aunt Tenie did not go back to Lake Charles because she could not. Mr. E-ud had left her, probably for Miss Thelma Harris who travelled and took the Delineator. Remembering her spunky spirit, though (had she not on one of our trips to the cemetery stood squarely on Miss Mattie McFarlane's grave and said "Rise up, Mattie McFarlane, and entertain us," and been a little provoked, I thought, when Miss Mattie, dead, and of a more retiring disposition than my aunt, had not done so) I knew that she would never admit that she was not going back.

"What's your face doing so red, hon?" She looked down at me closely from under the shingled hairdo. "You ain't catching something I'm liable to take home to Mr. E-ud in Lake Charles, are you?" But before I could answer she had swerved King abruptly away from the post office. "Watch out," she warned. "Squat down in the surrey and hide the little hat. There's Mama Lu prissing down the street like she owns it."

My hat askew (in the presence of my grandmother herself, it seemed to have lost all her stable qualities) I squatted low in the surrey. And though it occurred to me that this was the time my aunt might waver, that the exigencies of the situation called for compromise—"It is somewhat cooler today," "Perhaps the Ben Dort heat is lessening to a degree" (a wiser course for her to have followed in view of her further enforced stay) I was glad she made no concessions.

"I don't feel like tackling that hardheaded old sister in this doggone Ben Dort heat." Maneuvering a corner, she turned King down a side street. "How about it, precious," she said when

we had successfully eluded my grandmother, "don't you want to join them cute little Confederate kids with me and Mr. E-ud?"

Straightening the little hat on my head, I nodded, proud to be her favorite niece, and safe now in the knowledge that I would never have to prance with the UDC. One morning we would awaken, the sun plucking like hot fingers at our pillows, and find Aunt Tenie had gone, to get her a job clerking in Beaumont.

Sonnet

A, without love, considers
B spilt batter with no center
Except the direction he commands,
Abhorring it. Is tolerant in hopes
B could be C (Ice Cream!)
Which he is sick for. Hope and
Hopelessness on the part of
B, and gravity, with the help of
D through Z, collapse the tension.
A who has been standing there like
Sic Semper Tyrannis and beginning
To like it—important when nobody
Cares and with a vengeance—is left
Standing there. *Sic Semper Amoris*

ADRIAN BIRNEY*

*ADRIAN BIRNEY is a senior at Washington and Lee University.

Katie Letcher*

Patterns

I

Thank God
That a filthy,
Cinammon-dappled cur
Howls for his bitch lover,
Or his food,
And either will do.
Man, the hopeful,
Howl for your steak,
Or your love;
Either will do.

II

Across a misunderstood distance
Moonlight gilds even garbage cans;
And the dog-shape seen by night
Is pathetically redeemed.
There is always before, and we
Will be human forever after.
Dead silence intrudes, screaming.

III

The dirty dog
Stirs in his biologic sleep
On someone's back stoop,
Perhaps his own,
And automatically scratches.
But you in your high white bed
Will stir and awake
And watch the moon,
And weep as dogs never do.

*KATIE LETCHER is a senior at Hollins College.

Katie Letcher

Wallawhatoola

Once, if only
For the token length
Of a night
Turned to myth magic,
The river ran deep-starred,
Low lushing at the black overhung edge.
Bubbly whippoorwill
Fired the silence;
Far flew velvet voices
In the wet grass;
The air breathed corn and mist
And warm skin,
To weld the intrigue
Into a blue and silver
Keepsake.

August 6

Never again
In the green lap of evening
When one star is quite enough,
Will ripples silver as quietly
Along a curved amber bow.
Cool drops with the moon
Lurking in each
Splash and ball
On warm tan under the darkness,
And quiet hangs limpid, low
Upon the edge of fields,
And over the heavy banks
Along the Indian quiet river.

Katie Letcher

Evening With a Poet

Perched, a daguerrotype portrait, throned
Precariously on the edge of an armchair,
Ingratiating with charm and wine;
Winding a spell from a deep distance.
For the heritage of steel and satin,
No sound but the small bursting clink
Of cups and the swish stiff skirts.
We listen, all pastel and self-aggrandisement,
As you read, a voice we know and do not know.
We noted in aspect the crab's requisition,
And, over aching, the stress of a boy's lie.
Perhaps you revisited a different night,
That could be real or not,
When Yeats sat pensive in a massive chair,
Shaping a small island, at least, of your world.

Irma Wassall*

The Amateurs

(To the memory of Major Edward Bowes)

I. BARITONE FROM FRANCE

Although from France (this was before
The great upheaval) he was part American, born here
Twenty-five years earlier.
He wanted to see American girls before he married.
("When will he complete his survey?") He carried
High an aria from "La Traviata," wanting to be
Operatic baritone or radio singer with ability.
The Major said, "Either one would be a lucrative career."

II. TENOR ARIA

"Success will always break down indifference,"
The Major said. "Your time will come."
The boy "wanted to earn an honest dollar," hence
Came to New York "to take a look at it." "Some-
Thing about this city—when people don't 'take
To you' they do it nicely." He sang *M'appari*
From Flotow's "Martha," with a heaven-sent voice, to make
Me sad that one with such a voice should be
Earning that "honest dollar" on a freighter,
While hoping, believing, "life would be different" later.

III. BARITONE FROM CAIRO

He, who was born in Cairo,
Sang the *Prologue* from "Pagliacci"; he was no tyro.
He had been a clerk
In the American embassy
At Bucharest; his father's work
Was with a Roumanian company
Dealing in oil.
Of American girls he cried: "Oh la la, how beautiful!"
And, "It is the wonder city of the world—New York!"
He "most wished to become American citizen," he said.
"Your number is up," the Major smiled. "Just go ahead."

*IRMA WASSALL, of Wichita, Kansas, has published a book of poems, *Loonshadow*.

Irma Wassall

After a Storm at Night

In the night
the storm descended suddenly,
spent itself, and left behind it under the sulphurous aura over
the city, the wet
smell of bruised leaves, rain-beaten clover,
and a pungent weed whose once-known name eluded me.

The frogs, like a Russian chorus
of masculine Don Cossack voices—
baritones; incredibly
deep basses;
and tenors, clear and high—
resumed their singing for us,
and their song became our lullaby.

BOOK REVIEWS

95 *Poems*. E. E. CUMMINGS. Harcourt, Brace and Co. 1958.

The first poem in this latest collection by E. E. Cummings is typical of the volume as a whole.

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An unqualified emotion, with no context, is asserted and compared to falling leaf: *asserted*, not embodied. The typography creates an almost impenetrable visual complexity of surface—the poem strikes the eye, not the ear—to disguise the vapidness of the language and give a “modern” appearance to a poem of romantic sentimentality. The leaf image is conventional and random, not established in any context except Cummings’ private feelings about it. Any emotional and intellectual vitality is not objectified, but is prior to the poem. The word “loneliness” is indeed a “vehicle”: an empty conveyance into which Cummings tries to unburden himself of a feeling (the “tenor”); then he shoves it, like a wheelbarrow, towards the reader, hoping it may contain what he thought he put in it. Whether it does or not will depend on the reader’s willingness to feel a charitable sympathy towards a stranger’s cry of distress—not his *distress*, but his declaration of it. The poem is not an experience arrested, qualified, and publicized in language (like, for instance, Emily Dickinson’s “Renunciation is a piercing virtue”); it is an abstraction, a mere idea of experience, an assertion of it. The erratic typography may elicit our closer attention; but it gives us no assurance of the reality, of the concrete truth of the distress. We end by having to “take Cummings’ word for it”; it is not, as Pound would say, *there on the page*. Because the word,

despite its pretensions, is not really there either. There is only the dry husk of a word, floating as aimlessly as the falling leaf.

The nervous glitter of the poem's surface—it *looks* so like the fragmentation and recalcitrance of real experience—blinds the infatuated reader to its emptiness, its drab conventionality, very much as the bland paradoxes, snappy rhymes, and chic allusions of a Cole Porter lyric delude one into supposing that something actually is being said. Such tough-mindedness is only a glossy patina, and what the mesmerized reader sees in it is not a stable core of intelligible, objective experience, but merely the reflection of his own fatuity.

Cummings is so determined to freshen language (and, thereby, perception) by flouting its conventions that he ends by destroying convention, language, and perception itself. Linguistically, public contexts and traditions of usage form conventions, and it is from these that Cummings tries to escape. Language and perception are made possible only by society, by convention, just as only they make society possible: "the complete consort, dancing together." But Cummings cannot play upon and extend convention; he must smash it, escape society and the public tradition, and be individual to the point of anarchy. Thus his language tends to isolation and privacy. Its only vital context is his own mind, which remains, for us, permanently unknowable. *Non serviam!*

crazy jay blue)
demon laughshriek
ing at me
your scorn of easily
hatred of timid
& loathing for (dull all
regular righteous
comfortable) unworlds
thief crook cynic
(swimfloatdrifting
fragment of heaven)
trickstervillain
raucous rogue &
vivid voltaire
you beautiful anarchist
(i salute thee

(Poem 5)

This is one of the few successful poems in the volume* because Cummings has here become sufficiently detached partially to see his posture of Romantic envy of "free" nature as childish, as diabolism or anarchism. There is a kind of facile ingenuity in the paradoxes. But Cummings falls short of the crucial insight here: that anarchy is the blindest compulsion, that the proper use of convention, the discipline of technique ("regular" and "righteous"), promise our only liberation. Chaos is not freedom; isolation is not escape. And destroying the syntax and conventions of language does not free it: "Be bold, be bold, be not too bold." Distortion *may* be creative, but it is not equivalent to creation. Whatever else this "crazy jay blue" can do, he cannot write this poem. He can only "laughshriek." It took an adult mind to write this poem—Cummings the poet, not Cummings the "raucous rogue" and "beautiful anarchist," which he so frequently, so sadly, pretends to be, with such unfortunate results:

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(Poem 24)

Dr. Williams has written that Cummings "avoids the cliché first by avoiding the whole accepted modus of english." This poem is obviously an avoidance of conventions of metrics and syntax. Whether it avoids platitude is another question. After

*Other poems which seem to me successful, or interesting for various reasons, are Nos. 10, 35, 42 (the sestet), 49, 52, 72, 91, and 94.

we excogitate, transpose, and reassemble the elements of the poem, it is to be seriously doubted whether our experience is enlarged or our perception freshened. The note of autumnal loneliness (struck repeatedly in this new volume) is a familiar one, a mood of adolescent romanticism in which everyone can participate vicariously simply by letting down the guard of a critical intelligence and extending a little sympathetic indulgence. Everyone, after all, likes roses and birds and love, and most everyone equates loneliness with deep seriousness.

Moreover, the deliberate unconventionality of surface assures the reader of the difficulty, the tough-witted modernity, the complexity, which he has been taught to look for, so that when he has unscrambled and "mastered" the poem's surface, and seized the vague cliché and worn-out mood which the surface conceals, by indulging that very conventionality and sentiment at the center of the poem, he can congratulate himself on having made a difficult, rare and enhanced discovery. This is the stratagem which a Cummings most usually employs: not to avoid the cliché, but to conceal it. Perception is not renewed; it is counterfeited. The carefully calculated anarchism of style and attitude, where not simply flat, becomes frequently a little ridiculous, like an urchin sticking out his tongue to razz his adults—as in these stanzas from Cummings' embarrassing little poem on the Hungarian revolt, "Thanksgiving (1956)":

uncle sam shrugs his pretty
pink shoulders you know how
and he twitches a liberal titty
and lisps "i'm busy right now"

so rah-rah-rah democracy
let's all be thankful as hell
and bury the statue of liberty
(because it begins to smell)

(Poem 39)

It is just this sort of raucous roguery—Cummings in knee-britches, playing the little monster—that leads to the gratuitous shocks of syntax, the exploration of "thrill" effects, which finally deaden so much of the language thus brutalized . . . as the useless inversion

of "living" dulls rather than sharpening the impact of these two lines:

a total stranger one black day
knocked living the hell out of me—

(Poem 58)

We leave this volume, which begins with poems of loneliness and ends in celebrations of love, with the disquieting sense that neither experience has been made real. The brittle glitter of the surface betrays, by its very nervousness and strain, the vacuum of thought and feeling within. If this image is perhaps reminiscent of Cole Porter or the Great Gatsby, then it should reveal Cummings in a very characteristic posture: the aging but incorrigible Child of the Twenties.

EDWARD M. HOOD*

Selected Poems, 1928-1958. STANLEY KUNITZ. Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1958. \$3.75.

Poems with the special excellence of those by Stanley Kunitz, now gathered in *Selected Poems, 1928-1958*, leave nothing to chance; they shape occasions for the sharing of their pleasures and insights, tuning the grateful ear while playing on it, transforming the reader quickly into spectator and auditor by the genuine show of taste and tact and candor. But they do this much at a certain cost; they so refine their shaping medium, so perfect their form, as to convert practiced mastery into a risky venture in which success is paradoxically contingent on failure, the particular failure risked becoming a measure of the achieved communication and delight. Both Mr. Kunitz's wisdom and his delight are imaged in his form, and the form is at once the constricting limit and the fulfilled achievement of his art.

What chiefly characterizes the form, and qualifies accordingly the matter known and the experience enjoyed, is its admirable clarity, to which transparent diction, smooth textures, and an un-

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insistent tone all make their contribution. This is the poetry of refreshingly unabashed declarations ("Tell them I say the heart forgives / The world. Yes, I believe. In love."), of compact summations ("The thing that eats the heart is mostly heart."). "He" in the poem of that title is not named (and the poem hinges on his being nameless), but there are no obscuring mists in the lines: "No gifts, no tears, no company / He brings, but wind-rise and water-flow," and there are no blurred edges in "The necessary fierce details / Implacably he has designed." Mr. Kunitz's rhythms are unobtrusive but nonetheless distinct, felt, and sure. In the masterful "The Dragonfly" they are meticulously controlled to register every shift in attention and feeling, to heighten each observed detail. In "Organic Bloom," the movement of meditative feeling establishes a more resilient rhythm within the structure of the sonnet. In "Hermetic Poem," the distillation of experience is complete and crystalline:

The secret my heart keeps
Flows into cracked cups.

No saucer can contain
This overplus of mine:

It glisters to the floor,
Lashing like lizard fire

And ramps upon the walls
Crazy with ruby ills.

Who enters by my door
Is drowned, burned, stung, and starred.

In view of perfection such as this, the occasional straining for bold effects or extended scale that mars "Among the Gods," "The Economist's Song," and the otherwise very fine "Night Letter" is inconsequential indeed. Yet it is the very perfection of "Hermetic Poem," rather than the occasional lapse elsewhere, that defines the limitations of Mr. Kunitz's form. It is not that the secret is denied or ceases to be secret but that the poem leads one to forget its mystery in favor of the poem's careful modulations of rhyme and meter, to say nothing of its visual brilliancy and precision or the delicate fluctuations in pace, which are superbly rendered. They reduce the mystery to a mere occasion for the more engaging ef-

fects of form and experience which flow from it. Even in the crowning intensity of the last couplet, the poem turns from rather than embraces the full depths which seem to be included in its subject. The density lost is the limiting measure of the clarity and intensity gained.

There are passages in "Night Letter" where the informality of address and the combination of blunt statement and the helpless perplexity do suggest the troubled, pained response to an appalling world which Mr. Kunitz shares with Auden. But too often the violence or the torment of "the wound" which is Mr. Kunitz's subject is dissolved rather than imaged in the textures of his verse. On occasion wit and irony serve to remove a horror to a safe distance rather than to sharpen and make immediate, as wit and irony can, the experience at hand. After asking "How shall I keep this violence in, / My no-name and my nothing-knows, / Original with fire and sin," Mr. Kunitz declares that it can not be done, but softens the presumed violence nonetheless by identifying the "no-name" too readily as the familiar "mastiff breed," and naming it "Rover."

The best poems in the volume (and many are superb) are those in which the subject and the play of word and formal artifice are developed in perfect reciprocity and actually interpenetrate. One instance is the brilliantly fantastic "The Supper Before Last." Another is the incredibly moving poem, "The Tutored Child." Here the form stands unobtrusive yet distinct, poised midway between the relaxed simplicity that might suggest indifference and the verbal intricacies that could either strain or dissipate the effect. It becomes the perfect image for the tragic distance between the child and the world that nurtured him, and for the compassion, recognized as helpless, of the poet who weeps for him.

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